

Message Text

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47

ACTION EUR-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 EURE-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-07 H-03

INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-10 PA-04 RSC-01 PRS-01 SPC-03

SS-20 USIA-15 SAM-01 COME-00 EB-11 LAB-06 SIL-01

OPR-02 SY-10 INT-08 IO-14 DRC-01 /157 W

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INFO AMEMBASSY BONN

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AMEMBASSY COPENHAGEN

AMEMBASSY DUBLIN

AMEMBASSY LUXEMBOURG

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY ROME

AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE

USMISSION NATO BRUSSELS

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINT, EGEN, UK

SUBJECT: COAL STRIKE ANNOUNCEMENT TRIGGERS GENERAL
ELECTION SPECULATION.

1. ANNOUNCEMENT OF COAL STRIKE IMMEDIATELY INTENSIFIED
SPECULATION IN PRESS AND POLITICAL CIRCLES THAT GOVERN-
MENT WILL FIND IT NECESSARY TO CALL A SNAP GENERAL
ELECTION. IN COMMONS ON FEBRUARY 5, HEATH'S STATEMENT
THAT NUM HAD NEVER BEEN PREPARED TO NEGOTIATE,
AND THAT "IT IS TO OUR INFINITE REGRET THAT THE MINERS
HAVE NOT ACCEPTED THE WILL OF PARLIAMENT" ARE TAKEN TO
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MEAN THAT HE IS THINKING IN THESE TERMS.

2. IT IS POSSIBLE THAT PM AT THIS STAGE MAY STILL BELIEVE HE CAN FACE SITUATION OUT WITHOUT AN ELECTION. BUT THIS COURSE HAS MANY RISKS. FEW DOUBT THAT MINERS HAVE SUFFICIENT DETERMINATION TO HOLD OUT ONCE THEY EMBARK ON THEIR STRIKE. HOWEVER, THEY WILL NOT BE RECEIVING UNION STRIKE PAY AND WILL THEREFORE HAVE A VERY STRONG INCENTIVE TO MAKE IMPACT OF STRIKE FELT AS QUICKLY AS POSSIBLE. MINERS HAVE MADE IT CLEAR THAT THEIR PRICE FOR A SETTLEMENT AFTER A STRIKE HAS BEGUN MAY WELL BE HIGHER. IF PM CHOOSES TO CONFRONT A STRIKE SITUATION ONLY WITH RENEWED OFFERS OF NEGOTIATIONS ABOUT FUTURE BENEFITS, WHILE HOPING PRESSURES OF PUBLIC OPINION WILL BE HEEDDED BY MINERS, MOST BELIEVE THAT HE WILL HAVE A LONG WAIT. AND WHILE THIS IS GOING ON, EFFECTS OF A STRIKE, WHETHER OR NOT ATTENUATED BY STRICT ENFORCEMENT (OR OBSERVANCE) OF PICKETING LAWS, WILL REACH A CRITICAL POINT FOR MANY INDUSTRIES IN A MATTER OF WEEKS. PRESSURES FOR AN END TO STRIKE IN SUCH A SITUATION, WE BELIEVE, WOULD BECOME IRRESISTABLE, AND SUCH AN END COULD BE ACHIEVED ONLY BY GOVERNMENT SUR-RENDER.

3. POLITICAL RISKS OF SUCH A SCENARIO ARE EVIDENT TO TORIES AND OPPOSITION ALIKE. THEY WOULD ALMOST CERTAINLY UNDERMINE HEATH'S LEADERSHIP OF CONSERVATIVE PARTY, AND SOME PRESS COMMENTATORS HAVE SUGGESTED THIS COULD LEAD TO HIS REMOVAL. THEY WOULD INCAPACITATE GOVERNMENT IN ANY FURTHER ATTEMPTS TO PURSUE A SERIOUS INCOMES POLICY.

4. MANY TORY MP'S AND PARTY OFFICIALS ARGUE THAT THESE RISKS ARE TOO HIGH TO RUN. THAT MORE OF THEM ARE NOT YET SO EXPRESSING THEMSELVES PUBLICLY IS DUE IN PART TO THEIR EXPERIENCE DURING WEEK OF JANUARY 14 WHEN IT WAS THOUGHT AN ELECTION WAS A SURE THING. NO LONGER CONFIDENT THEY KNOW THEIR LEADER'S MIND, THEY ARE PLAYING IT SAFE FOR MOMENT.

5. PM, THOUGH, MUST BE AWARE OF THESE ARGUMENTS, AND LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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VIEWS OF MP'S AND PARTY OFFICIALS FAVORING AN ELECTION ARE BEING PRESSED ON HIM. WHILE HE MAY HAVE WISHED TO AVOID AN ELECTION THAT COULD BE UNUSUALLY DIVISIVE FOR THE COUNTRY, HOUR FOR DECISION IS FAST APPROACHING. IF HEATH DECIDES FOR SNAP ELECTION, HE WILL AT LEAST START OUT HAVING CONVINCED SOME OF THE PUBLIC THAT HE HAS GENUINELY EXPLORED ALL POSSIBLE COMPROMISE APPROACHES TO MINERS' DEMANDS. GOVERNMENT WILL HAVE TO ATTEMPT TO

CONFINE ELECTION ISSUE AS CLOSELY AS POSSIBLE TO MINERS'
DISPUTE (WHO RUNS THE COUNTRY?) WHILE AT SAME TIME
SPELLING OUT ITS POLICIES TO DEAL WITH AN ECONOMY IN
SEVERELY STRAITENED CIRCUMSTANCES IN SUCH A MANNER AS
TO CONVINCE ELECTORATE TO GIVE IT A VOTE OF CONFIDENCE
AND A "DOCTOR'S MANDATE."

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